



New Mexico Judicial Branch Performance Evaluation Reference Manual

Administrative Office of the Courts
Human Resources Division

1995

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The Purpose of Performance Management

The purpose of the performance management process is two-fold:

- To provide a process through which each employee can continue to develop skills and abilities needed for current and future job responsibilities;
- To provide a decision tool which ensures objective, job-related measures of performance effectiveness, which are essential to the compensation decisions necessary for the New Mexico Judicial Branch's philosophy of pay-for-performance, or merit-based increases in pay.

Performance Development

The Performance Management process used by the New Mexico Judicial Branch ensures ongoing communication between a supervisor or manager and the employees in his or her work group. In order for each employee to perform at his or her highest potential, this ongoing communication must include the following:

- Clear expectations about what work is expected from an employee and about the standards to be met in accomplishing the work;
- Frequent feedback to the employee regarding work that meets, exceeds or falls short of expectations and standards;
- Frequent coaching to assist the employee in improving his or her work results and approaches and to help the employee prepare for increasing job responsibilities;
- Objective and clearly communicated evaluation of how well the employee has done in meeting expectations and standards, both for specific aspects (performance dimensions) of the employee's work and for the employee's work effectiveness overall;
- Information about the resources that are available, such as training programs, cross-training opportunities, or work assignments, which will help the employee to continue to improve and to prepare for increasing responsibility.

In addition to the specific, objective evaluation of each employee's performance, supervisors and managers will also work with each employee to establish a plan for improvement. For some employees, this improvement will be essential to raise their performance so that it meets expectations and standards. For other employees, this improvement is necessary to the effectiveness of the judiciary overall. And for still other employees, this improvement is the avenue for their career progression through positions of increasing responsibility and accountability.

Compensation

The New Mexico Judicial Branch bases compensation on a pay-for-performance philosophy; that is, financial incentives of higher increases are given to those employees who perform above expectations when such financial incentives are appropriated by the legislature. Such a philosophy requires accurate measures of performance that are objective and job-related. These performance measures must also be considered fair by the employees whose work is evaluated.

The components of the Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form are designed to assist supervisors and employees in an accurate, objective, job-related assessment of each employee's work effectiveness. Additionally, the components are designed to encourage more open communication between supervisors and employees regarding how performance is evaluated.

When the process of Performance Management is correctly and carefully followed, supervisors, managers, and employees can all feel more confident that the decisions regarding pay have been fairly made.

The Components of the Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form

There are several components of the Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form; some are for identification, rater assistance and approval requirements, but the major components of the form provide for a comprehensive evaluation of the employee's work.

Employee Information

The information included in this section simply provides the identification of the employee and is needed for recordkeeping. The hire date is the month and year of the employee's first employment with the Judicial Branch. (Specific dates for signatures are provided on the final page of the Form.)

Reason for Evaluation

The primary reason for evaluation is the annual assessment required of each employee's performance. Evaluations may also be completed midway through the employee's probationary period (typically six months) during which the employee is being trained. Another reason for evaluating an employee may include the circumstance of the employee being moved to a different work group; an evaluation done at this time helps to preserve a record of the performance effectiveness of the employee in the former position. A supervisor may also prepare an evaluation at one or more specified points of time when an employee's performance is observed to be on the decline or when the employee is in disciplinary procedures.

Instructions to Rater

The instructions to the rater provided on the first page of the Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form provide a brief explanation of how to complete the major components of the form. More complete instructions are in this section on the components of the Form.

Performance Dimensions

There are eight performance dimensions to be used in evaluating the work effectiveness of employees, supervisors, and managers:

- Job knowledge;
- Work quality;
- Productivity/efficiency;
- Communication;
- Work habits;
- Safety/security;
- Supervision; and
- Performance evaluation.

Each performance dimension includes a general definition of the dimension, a box for identifying the employee's rating on the dimension, a section for indicating the degree of importance the dimension has for the job, and five behavioral descriptions which differentiate the levels of performance on the dimension.

Determining Importance of Dimensions

The criteria for determining the degree of importance of the dimension are as follow:

- **Major**
A performance dimension is considered a major component of an employee's work if the employee's skills in that dimension are essential to successful performance of the job. For example, most jobs in the judiciary require a substantial knowledge of court procedures and regulations; consequently, Job Knowledge will be a major performance dimension for most, if not all, positions.
- **Minor**
A performance dimension is considered a minor component of an employee's work if the employee's use of this behavior is necessary on a limited number of lower priority tasks. For example, a word processor working primarily in an office setting and with documents that do not contain sensitive information may be considered to have Safety/Security as a minor performance dimension.
- **Not Applicable (NA)**
A performance dimension is considered not applicable to a job when the employee's responsibilities do not include the behaviors described in the dimension. For example, non-supervisory employees, in most cases, will not be evaluated on the dimensions of Supervision and Performance Evaluation.

A supervisor or agency may pre-determine which dimensions have major consequences to the job. It is possible for all of the dimensions to be considered major.

Performance Levels

The levels of performance evaluation are as follow:

- **Consistently Exceeds Requirements (CE)**
An employee whose work on any dimension consistently exceeds requirements is one who regularly goes beyond the standards expected for the work. In addition, this employee typically demonstrates an initiative in looking for, exploring, and implementing more effective ways of working. This employee's performance sets an example for others, and this employee often uses his or her expertise and experience to teach others.
- **Exceeds Requirements (ER)**
An employee whose work on any dimension exceeds requirements is one who often goes beyond the standards expected for the work. This employee's co-workers are likely to recognize the employee's work and behavior as being predictably high quality and effective.
- **Meets Requirements (MR)**
An employee whose work on any dimension meets requirements at a level expected for the work, both in quality and quantity of work.
- **Needs Improvement (NI)**
An employee whose work needs improvement on any dimension is not consistently able to meet the requirements set for the position. This employee requires more direction and help in order to complete tasks; in some cases, the greater need for help may come from the circumstance that the

employee is still being trained for the position. This assessment may also be appropriate for an employee who has been in the position a sufficient amount of time to have been trained but who still has difficulty meeting the standards set for the position.

- **Fails to Meet Requirements (FM)**

An employee whose work fails to meet requirements on any dimension is one who is no longer in the training period and whose work consistently falls short of the standards set for the position. In some cases, the employee may demonstrate open or subtle resistance to the expectations set by the supervisor. Co-workers recognize this employee's work as consistently falling short of the standards.

An essential part of the supervisor's evaluation of an employee's level of work on each performance dimension is the evidence the supervisor provides to support the evaluation. Information about specific instances or characteristic patterns of behavior should be included in the Comments section for each performance dimension.

Evaluation Summary

There are three questions posed for the supervisor in the Evaluation Summary of the Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form:

- **What are this employee's primary accomplishments during this review period?**

The information which a supervisor should provide in response to this question should highlight the most significant work which the employee has produced. The accomplishments may be a special project completed, an exceptional quality or quantity of work produced, assistance provided to co-workers, unusual requirements met, or skills and knowledge acquired. Only in cases where an employee's work in most or all performance dimensions fails to meet requirements would a supervisor not identify some accomplishments.

- **What are this employee's strengths?**

The information provided in response to this question might focus on performance dimensions in which the employee excels, or it may include additional information such as how the employee works with others, how quickly the employee learns new skills, or how the employee contributes to a positive, productive work climate.

- **What are this employee's areas for improvement?**

The information provided in response to this question likewise might focus on performance dimensions in which the employee fails to meet requirements or continues to need improvement. Examples of other information which might be provided here include how the employee responds to direction, how the employee behaves toward co-workers, or how the employee approaches new tasks or responsibilities.

Development Plan

The development plan is the forward-looking component of the Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form. In section C, the supervisor and the employee discuss and agree upon expectations for the coming performance year. If agreement cannot be reached, the supervisor's decision will prevail.

- **Job Goals**

This section focuses on what is of primary importance for the employee to accomplish over the coming year. For employees performing routine tasks, the goals may address quality or productivity standards. For employees whose work is more project-based, the goals may identify the project and its desired outcome.

The format recommended for the goals is as follows:

"To [action verb] a [specific result] by [date].

Good goals and objectives are SMART:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Relevant
Timely

In other words:

Specific	Good goals and objectives spell out explicitly what will be accomplished as a result of the goal or objective.
Measurable	Good goals and objectives include results that can be measured, so that we answer the question: "How will we know if we have accomplished the goal?"
Achievable	Good goals and objectives are realistic; they describe a result that is not impossible for the individual to achieve.
Relevant	Good goals and objectives work toward results that are significant, that are important for the organization to achieve and that are consistent with the organization's purpose.
Timely	Good goals and objectives set specific dates at which time the results will have been achieved.

Good goals and objectives also are:

Challenging	Good goals and objectives work toward a result that requires the individual to stretch somewhat beyond existing skills and capabilities.
Limited	Good goals and objectives don't place excessive demand on an individual; a good rule of thumb is that any individual should not have more than six or seven goals.
Controllable	Good goals and objectives establish results which are under the control of the individual responsible for achieving them.

- **Personal/Career Goal**

In addition to mutually agreed upon goals for the employee's job responsibilities, the supervisor and employee should discuss what the employee wants to achieve in his or her career. A goal in this section might be a specific, short-term goal, such as to achieve a level of mastery in the current position; or it may be a long-term goal that is more general, such as to be promoted to a management or senior professional level.

- **Skills and Knowledge to Be Developed**

The supervisor, after analyzing the effectiveness of the employee's performance, should identify the skills and knowledge which the employee could learn in order to improve his or her work. These may be necessary to help the employee in meeting requirements of his or her current position, or the skills and knowledge may be beneficial in preparing the employee to move to a higher level position.

- **Training Plans**

The supervisor should identify in this section what avenue will be used for the employee to acquire skills and knowledge needed to improve. If a training program is available that addresses the need, the specific training program should be identified. If the employee would benefit from cross-training, the specific responsibilities to be learned and when the cross-training will occur should be identified. If the employee would benefit from a different work assignment, the specific assignment and the timing for the change should be identified.

The supervisor should make clear to the employee that these are plans and not binding commitments. Funds may be too limited for training programs, or other personnel changes may interfere with plans for cross-training or work assignment changes.

Overall Evaluation

The final component of the supervisor's appraisal of an employee's work is in the overall evaluation. This component includes three elements:

- **Overall Performance Rating**

There is *not* a formula to be used in determining the employee's overall rating. Rather this evaluation comes from the supervisor's assessment of the employee's overall effectiveness in the job. The overall rating will obviously depend more heavily upon those performance dimensions that are identified as a major component of the job.

- **Supervisor's Comments**

In this section the supervisor should summarize the overall effectiveness of the employee's work, drawing on specific aspects of performance to support the overall evaluation.

- **Employee's Comments**

In this section, the employee has an opportunity to provide his or her view of overall performance. The intent is *not* for this section to include simply an employee's agreement with or rebuttal of the supervisor's assessment. Rather it should be the employee's own summary of his or her strengths and areas of improvement in work performance. Like the supervisor, the employee should also support his or her self-assessment with references to specific aspects of performance or performance dimensions.

Signatures and Distribution Instructions

- **For Magistrate Courts and AOC**

When the supervisor and employee have completed their discussion of the written evaluation, both need to sign and date the last page of the form. The original Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form is then signed by the Presiding Judge (reviewer) or in the case of the chief clerk's evaluation the only signature required is that of the Presiding Judge. Before sending the original completed evaluation form and cover rating sheet to the AOC, a copy must be given to the employee and a copy should be retained at the court.

- **For District Courts, Metropolitan Court and all other Agencies**

When the supervisor and employee have completed their discussion of the written evaluation, both need to sign and date the last page of the form. The original Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form is then signed by the next higher level supervisor (reviewer). Before sending the cover rating sheet to the AOC, a copy must be given to the employee and the original is to be retained in the court or agency personnel file.

The Steps in the Process of Performance Management

The Performance Management process includes much more than simply the annual evaluation of an employee's performance. It begins with clear communication from the supervisor or manager at the start of the performance year about what is expected from the employee's work and what standards the work must meet. It includes frequent feedback and coaching throughout the performance year. It requires that the supervisor guide the employee through a self-assessment process. And the annual evaluation process requires careful consideration of both the employee's prior year of work and the employee's need for continued improvement and growth.

Clear Communication from the Start

In order to do a job well, all employees (supervisors, too!) need a clear understanding right from the start of *what* they are expected to do and *how* they can do the job most effectively.

- **What to Do - The Task**

Before beginning a task, an employee should understand the result expected from accomplishing the task. For example, if the task is to prepare a document, the employee will be better able to do so if he or she can see what a completed, correct document looks like. In explaining the task, then, the supervisor should focus on the end result--what the product or service is that is provided by the task, what a good job looks like, in what way the quality of the work is measured (number of errors, time required), and what purpose the result of the task serves (how is it used, why is it important).

- **How to Do It - The Approach**

When an employee is new to the job, or when the task is a new one, the supervisor can help by describing not only the end result but also the step-by-step approach to accomplishing the end result. An employee who fails to meet expectations in a specific aspect of performance may also need more explanation of how to accomplish the job. More experienced employees are less likely to need this level of detail and may actually prefer the supervisor to delegate some flexibility in how they accomplish the task. However, there may be cases where even the experienced employee needs information about the supervisor's expectations regarding how they will accomplish the task, particularly if there is a change in the process or a special requirement (for example, wanting an employee to involve other employees in making a decision).

For most people, not knowing from the start what the end result of a task is and what expectations should be met in how the task is accomplished is like being asked to shoot a target without knowing what the target is or where it is. Hitting the target under those circumstances is primarily due to chance.

Frequent Feedback and Coaching

Feedback is the information a supervisor provides an employee about how the employee's work has met, exceeded, or fallen short of what is expected. Feedback is praise for a job well done and constructive criticism of work that needs to improve. Feedback is essential for employees to continue doing good work and to change when improvement is necessary; without feedback, employees begin to wonder if anyone knows what they're doing and if anyone really cares.

Feedback that meets the following characteristics is more likely to motivate an employee to change or to continue good work:

- **Honest** Comments to an employee on his or her work, particularly when those comments are intended to identify work that falls short of expectations, must be truthful, to the point, and not glossed over or neglected for fear of offending the employee. However, honest feedback should also be phrased in such a way that is helpful for improving behavior and not a personal attack.
- **Accurate** A supervisor is responsible for gathering accurate information regarding an employee's work, not relying on unsubstantiated hearsay.
- **Specific** Without specific information regarding what he or she said or did--that is, behavior--improvement performance that falls short or even reinforcement of good performance is limited.
- **Timely** Behavior is most effectively reinforced or changed when it is provided as soon as possible after the incident which warrants feedback.
- **Clear** In formulating the message for providing feedback, supervisors should consider what words will best communicate regarding the employee's work. Communication barriers to consider and guard against include how personal style influences word choice, how personal style influences what a person hears, and what other distractions might interfere with clear communication.
- **Concise** Use as few words as possible to communicate completely.
- **Credible** Employees are more likely to accept a supervisor's feedback as valid when they believe that the supervisor understands the work they are doing, understands why specific results are important, and recognizes the constraints under which employees must work.
- **Consistent** Employees respond best to feedback when the information provided is consistent across time, consistent in what the supervisor expects from them and others, and consistent in the frequency with which it is given to all employees in the work group.

Feedback should be given as soon after an incident as possible. A supervisor should never wait for the annual evaluation discussion to provide information about an employee's work. Any information about the employee's which is included in the annual performance discussion should be something the supervisor and employee have already discussed at the time the work was done. In other words, there should be no surprises during the annual evaluation discussion.

In deciding where to talk with an employee about his or her work, a general rule of thumb is to praise publicly, correct privately. A supervisor should be aware, however, that some employees may be embarrassed by public praise; for these employees, private praise is more effective.

Coaching is the future-oriented assistance a supervisor provides an employee which is intended to help the employee be more effective in the current job or to better prepare for increased responsibilities.

For employees to best benefit from a supervisor's instruction, coaching should meet the following characteristics:

- **Take a problem-solving approach**
A supervisor skilled in coaching will draw the employee into a discussion of his or her performance, encouraging the employee to carefully analyze his or her work and evaluate results and the

consequences of those results. Rather than attempting to establish fault, the skilled supervisor works with the employee to consider and develop more effective ways of achieving improved results.

- **Emphasize future performance**

The focus of effective coaching is on influencing an employee's future performance, on preparing the employee to work more productively and to acquire new skills for future growth. The attention is *not* given to prior performance, except to the extent that a clear understanding of prior work practices and results helps the employee to better understand how to improve and why improvement is important.

- **Geared to the individual's learning style**

Employees learn in different ways; some learn more effectively when they have time to read and think about improved ways of working, while others learn best when they have a chance to interact with the supervisor and actually try out different approaches. An effective coach makes an effort to determine what each employee's learning style is and then takes that learning style into consideration when preparing to coach that employee.

Keeping Notes on Performance

Throughout the performance review period, a supervisor should be keeping notes on their employees' work. This is necessary for providing a balanced, complete review of each employee's work over the prior performance period. Without notes to jog memory, a supervisor may be more likely to make some of the mistakes common in performance evaluation, such as the "recency" effect (what have you done for me lately?) or the "halo" effect (one wonderful quality or event makes everything else an employee does look good).

These "memory joggers" will help a supervisor remember and describe all the important incidents of an employee's work. Having good notes actually makes it easier for a supervisor to complete an employee's annual evaluation.

Notes on employees' work don't need to be extensive or formal; they only need to provide enough information for a supervisor to develop a complete picture of the prior year's work for each employee supervised. The form of notes a supervisor keeps should be suited to his or her own style; some can quickly write a detailed narrative, while others are able to fully recall an event with a few short phrases.

The Employee's Self-Assessment

An employee's best work is most likely to be done when the employee and the supervisor consider themselves to be partners in the employee's performance. The employee has responsibility for knowing and meeting expectations, just as the supervisor has responsibility for clearly communicating those expectations.

A part of the performance management process adopted by the New Mexico Judicial Branch is the employee's own assessment of his or her work. Using the Performance Planning and Appraisal Form, the employee should determine, from his or her perspective, how important each dimension is to effective performance of the job. The employee should also evaluate himself or herself on each of the dimensions considered to be a major or minor component of the job. Self-assessment also includes the employee's view of major accomplishments, strengths and areas of improvement. The employee, like the supervisor, should also consider what work goals should be accomplished in the next year and what personal goals he or she sees as important. And the employee should also give careful consideration to what training, cross-training, or on-the-job assignments could be beneficial in his or her continued development.

When the supervisor and employee discuss the employee's self-assessment, the supervisor may find opportunities to coach the employee on specific aspects of the job in which the employee lacks confidence. Like the supervisor, the employee should also be prepared to support his or her self-assessment by pointing to specific examples of work.

The Annual Evaluation

The Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form is intended to make the annual evaluation of each employee's work simpler to accomplish and more objective. The supervisor's notes on performance kept throughout the year can also help to simplify the process of the annual evaluation.

- **Performance Dimensions**

For each performance dimension the supervisor must first determine how significant the dimension is to successful performance of the job the employee is assigned to accomplish. The descriptions for each degree of importance (major, minor, not applicable) are provided on page four of this manual.

A supervisor or agency may choose to expand or modify the rating criteria for each dimension. In addition, job specific performance standards may be developed to more accurately fit the duties of the position. If developed, these new standards should be discussed with the employee prior to evaluation.

The supervisor then reads the behavioral descriptions for each level of performance and determines which level best describes the actual work of the employee (additional information on each of the levels of performance is also found on pages four and five of this manual). Having some notes to remind him or her of specific incidents can help the supervisor better match the employee's work to the behavioral descriptions. A recommended approach for matching actual work to behavioral descriptions is to begin in the center with the descriptions for "Meets Requirements." If the employee's work fits the descriptions at this level, move to the descriptions provided for "Exceeds Requirements." If most or all of the descriptions fit the employee's work, move to the descriptions for "Consistently Exceeds Requirements" and determine how well these descriptions fit. In either the case of "Exceeds Requirements" or "Consistently Exceeds Requirements," the supervisor should determine that the predominant portion of the descriptions provided for this level fit the employee's work; if only one or two aspects of the descriptions fit, the employee's work is probably better described as fitting the next lower level.

If the employee's work falls short of the descriptions in "Meets Requirements," the supervisor should read the descriptions for "Needs Improvement" and "Fails to Meet Requirements." If the supervisor finds that the lowest level of "Fails to Meet Requirements" most nearly matches the work of the employee, the supervisor should be prepared to discuss a plan of action for addressing the employee's failure to meet expectations.

NOTE: For each dimension, the supervisor should include notes in the "Comments" section that provide specific examples of the employee's actual work and that provide a fuller explanation of the employee's work in this dimension of performance.

- **Evaluation Summary**

For the evaluation summary, the supervisor should rely again on his or her notes to identify what the employee's major accomplishments have been over the past year. A major accomplishment could consist of a special assignment or project completed that was beyond the normal work requirements. Or it could include a particularly high level of quality or exceptional productivity in the employee's completion of routine tasks. Major accomplishments will tend to describe aspects of the task--*what* an employee does.

Strengths, on the other hand, will tend to describe *how* the employee accomplishes the task. A strength might be some specific skill or capability that the employee uses in getting the job done, such as exceptional word processing skill or such as his or her attention given to helping team members perform well.

Areas for improvement should single out those specific skills or dimensions of performance which most need the employee's attention. These might include the one or two key dimensions in which the employee's performance needs improvement or fails to meet requirements. Or they might be dimensions which are of primary importance to the job which are not yet a strength for the employee. Or they might focus on skills and capabilities the employee will need to continue to progress in his or her career.

- **Development Plan**

Job goals to be included on the Performance Planning and Appraisal Form focus the supervisor's and the employee's attention toward the future. The goals may describe improved productivity on routine tasks (e.g. "To process 20 documents per day with fewer than 2 errors by the end of the second quarter"), or they may describe special projects intended to improve work processes or correct problems (e.g. "To revise the intake process so as to minimize paperwork required by June 30").

The employee's personal or career goal should identify the direction he or she wants to take--to prepare to move on to a different or higher level position or to master the skills and knowledge required for the current position.

In the section for "Skills and Knowledge to Be Developed," the supervisor should identify specifically what the employee needs to learn in order to improve his or her performance, whether the improvement is required for meeting requirements in the current position or whether the improvement is beneficial to prepare the employee for increased responsibilities. Examples of skills and knowledge which might be identified include word processing skills, computer skills, interpersonal communication skills, conflict management, or specific court procedures and regulations.

Once the goals, skills and knowledge have been identified, the supervisor will next need to plan how to help the employee accomplish the goals and acquire the skills and knowledge. The plan might be to identify a specific training program or a type of training program, to describe a specific period of time during which the employee will be cross-training on particular jobs within the court, or to describe a specific work assignment which will involve the employee in learning the new skills or accomplishing the goals.

- **Overall Evaluation**

When determining the overall evaluation, the supervisor should at this time take a broader look at the employee's overall effectiveness in the job. If there are dimensions other than those which are identified on the form which have contributed to the employee's success in the job, the supervisor should note these aspects of performance in the "Supervisor's Comments" section. If there are behaviors not specifically mentioned in the dimensions which hinder the employee's ability to be effective, these behaviors should also be described in the "Supervisor's Comments" section.

The overall evaluation should incorporate all the details provided in the dimensions and evaluation summary sections, as well as any specifically identified behaviors described in the "Supervisor's Comments" section. The guidelines which describe each level of performance, found on pages four and five of this manual, also apply to overall evaluation.

If a salary grid is established, a new overall evaluation score will be identified. This new rating will be determined by weighting and totalling the points for each dimension. The weights for each dimension will be based on the major or minor importance of that dimension to the job.

Planning for Continued Development

The process for performance management should always incorporate evaluation with looking to the future. Once areas for improvement have been identified, specific plans should be developed for how to help the employee make the needed improvements. To the extent that all employees are looking to the future, the organization will benefit.

Compensation Decisions

The supervisor's overall evaluation of the employee becomes only one factor in making decisions regarding pay. Other factors include any changes in the cost-of-living index, pay differences caused by market conditions (how much the employer market will "pay" for a specific set of skills, such as probation officers and accounting professionals), and salary administration issues (where each individual falls within the salary table which sets pay ranges for each classification). The final compensation decision is complicated by the many variables beyond those of individual performance which may affect pay, but is especially affected by funding appropriated by the State Legislature.

The Supervisor's Role in Performance Management

Setting Clear Expectations

A primary responsibility a supervisor has in each employee's effective performance is making clear that the employee fully understands what is expected of him or her. With all employees, the supervisor must be clear in identifying *what* is expected, that is, the results that the employee is to accomplish in the job. For inexperienced employees, for those learning a new task or skill, or for those whose performance is falling short of expectations, the supervisor must also provide clear directions on *how* the results are to be accomplished.

Ongoing Feedback and Coaching

The supervisor can and should often be the employee's primary source of information on how he or she is doing on the job. No one can improve in a vacuum. All employees need feedback in order to better understand how effective they are in fulfilling their job requirements. When improvements are necessary, employees need help from the supervisor in developing a plan of action for improving performance. Learning by trial and error is a costly approach, for the individual and for the organization.

Objective Evaluation

In many respects, the process of performance management still includes a considerable amount of subjective evaluation on the part of the supervisor. Behavior is simply *not* something that can be quantified. When the subjective analysis of behavior is coupled with the fact that all human beings are biased to some degree by their individual values and beliefs, the supervisor has a difficult task. The Employee Performance Planning and Appraisal Form has been re-designed to help the supervisor eliminate as much of the subjectivity as possible, but the responsibility of performance management requires each supervisor to be carefully aware of his or her biases and to avoid having those biases influence the evaluation of each employee's work. Each employee deserves an objective view of his or her work effectiveness, and the organization depends upon the supervisor to provide one.

The Employee's Role in Performance Management

Working with the Supervisor to Set Expectations

Though much of this manual has been devoted to describing the supervisor's responsibilities for performance management, the employee is the only person who can make a difference in his or her work. Even in situations where the supervisor is less available than the employee would like, or when the supervisor falls short of performance management responsibilities, the employee remains responsible for his or her performance. When the employee feels the supervisor hasn't provided sufficient explanation of the job's requirements, it is the employee's responsibility to ask for more information. When the employee feels that the supervisor's expectations are unrealistic, it is the employee's responsibility to initiate a discussion with the supervisor about those expectations.

Working at the Highest Level of Potential

A key question each employee should ask at the end of each performance cycle (in fact, regularly throughout the year) is "Have I done my best?" If the answer is "yes," then the employee can take pride in his or her work. If the answer is "no," then the employee should be willing to examine the reasons why not. Often it is tempting to want to point to organizational problems or supervisory issues as the cause of performance that is less than the best. These issues can prevent some employees from working at their potential. But each employee is responsible for providing the best work they are capable of providing, even in the midst of less-than-perfect circumstances.

Communicating Openly with the Supervisor

Just as the supervisor is responsible for providing ongoing feedback and coaching to employees, employees are responsible for keeping the supervisor informed. Employees should provide information not only about the work itself but also about their own ideas and even their frustrations with the organizational problems and supervisory issues mentioned above. Often supervisors are not aware of the conditions which make exceptional performance difficult. They may not be aware of how their own behavior makes it more difficult for the employee to work effectively. In circumstances such as these, the employee has a responsibility for alerting the supervisor to the resources needed or the difficulties encountered in getting the job done. Providing the information to the supervisor in a way that is constructive, that focuses on solving the problem rather than attacking the supervisor, benefits all concerned--the employee, the supervisor, the work team, and the organization.

Self-Assessment

Objective evaluation of one's own behavior is even more difficult than a supervisor's objective evaluation of an employees' performance. Recalling specific incidents can help employees, like supervisors, to establish a more objective basis for evaluation. When an employee's assessment differs substantially from that of the supervisor, the most productive way to try to resolve the difference is for each to consider the performance from the other's perspective. An employee can move forward more quickly by acknowledging that the supervisor has reasons for holding a particular perspective, by asking for more information about what led to the supervisor's perspective, by calmly presenting evidence to support his or her own perspective, and by looking for the kernel of truth that can be found in every criticism, no matter how unfounded it may seem.

Just as the supervisor is a more effective coach when he or she focuses on solving the problem rather than establishing blame, the employee can more quickly improve by asking about what he or she should do differently in the future rather than by arguing about the past. Doing so is seldom easy but over the long-term is to the employee's benefit.

There may be situations where the differences between an employee's self-assessment and the supervisor's assessment cannot be resolved between them. In those cases, either the employee or the supervisor may choose to seek help from Human Resources staff in working through the differences to a solution that meets everyone's satisfaction.